



STATEMENT OF AT&T CONNECTICUT

Regarding Raised House Bill 6187 An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees Before the Committee on Labor and Public Employees February 24, 2009

Proposal:

Raised House Bill 6187 would require certain employers to provide certain full time hourly, non-exempt employees who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement the right to accumulate and use paid sick leave.

Comments:

AT&T Connecticut opposes Raised House Bill No. 6187. Requiring employers to provide certain employees paid sick leave, as provided in this bill, would impair the ability of covered employers to manage their business operations and cause such employers economic harm. AT&T understands the importance of affording its full time employees the benefits necessary to ensure a good quality of work life and offers its employees a comprehensive benefit package, which includes paid sick leave. However, the requirements proposed by the bill would unreasonably restrict an employer's ability to effectively manage its work force.

AT&T's sick leave policies do not cap the number of sick days available. In AT&T's experience, sick leave policies which consist of a set number of paid sick days or hours, as proposed by Raised House Bill 6187, serve to create an expectation that such days or hours should be used up, regardless of circumstances. As a result of such an expectation, it is more difficult for a company to manage its work force and be confident that on any given day, sufficient employees are in place to perform the company's essential operations, a particularly critical issue for a company like AT&T with hundreds of thousands of customers across the state. The economic effect is compound – excess nonproductive paid time and inefficient operations result in serious economic harm to business interests and higher costs to customers. The bill also poses issues for employees since paid sick leave requirements that specify a minimum number of hours or days, in effect, create a ceiling or cap and potentially limit the time available for an employee to address a serious illness.

The bill would take away the employer's flexibility to manage its workforce and prevent abuse of its policy. Employers would be prohibited from requiring proof of the circumstances supporting eligibility for the leave if the employee takes less than three full days at any one time, regardless of the circumstances. For example, if an employee repeatedly calls in sick on Fridays, the employer would be subject to penalties under this bill if the employer requested evidence that the employee was actually sick or that other circumstances existed supporting eligibility for the leave. Likewise, an employer attempting to insure adequate coverage for an important project could be subject to penalties if the employer declined to promote an employee to work on the project who was often out sick.

Raised House Bill No. 6187 mandates that covered employees are entitled to accrue paid sick leave and carry such sick leave year to year. Not only does this provision greatly exacerbate the operational management issues and cause economic harm, as already described, but it also creates long term workforce planning issues and possible accounting issues for the affected companies. In short, this proposal greatly impairs a company's ability to successfully and profitably run a business.

AT&T Connecticut unequivocally supports the need to afford full time employees paid sick leave; however, Raised House Bill 6187 would impair a company's business operations, cause companies economic harm, and not necessarily benefit the affected employees. The design of paid sick leave policies is best left to employers who can tailor them most effectively to their business environment and, where applicable, the collective bargaining process. Section (2) (e) addresses this issue in part by exempting from the bill collective bargaining agreements effective prior to January 1, 2010. Such an exemption is important in light of the fact that companies and unions representing their employees have negotiated for special work rules – including sick day rules – and interfering with such agreements will hurt Connecticut's economy. In today's economy, employers large and small are struggling to maintain their economic footing. Now, more than ever, employers need the flexibility to manage their workforce to maximize efficiency.

Conclusion:

AT&T opposes Raised House Bill No.6187. In mandating that covered employers provide certain specific paid sick leave benefits, the bill would cause covered employers unreasonable operational and economic harm.